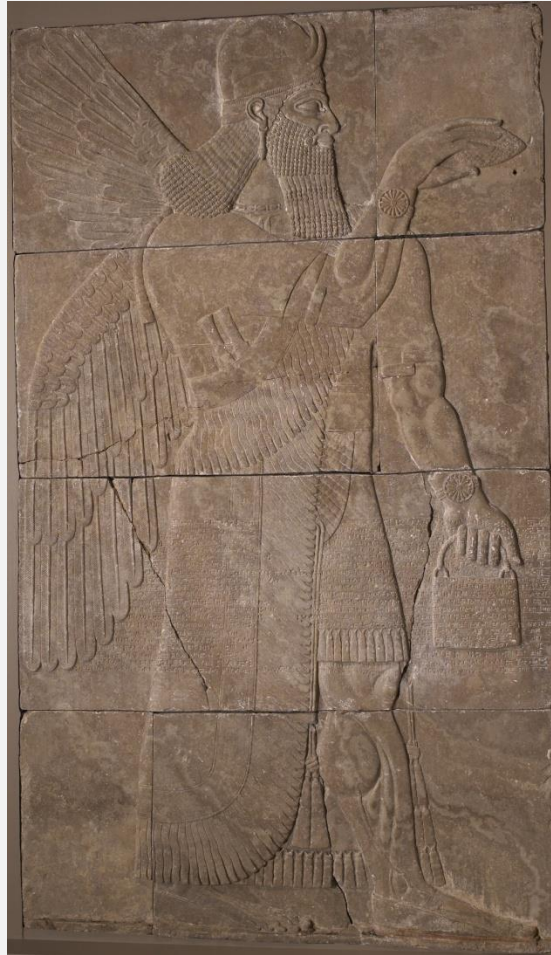


Source #2: Winged Genius, Assyrian, 883-859 BC



Brief Description of the Source and/or Background Information:

This carved alabaster panel once decorated an interior wall of King Ashurnasirpall II. A long frieze of figures like this one lined the walls of the palace and helped reinforce the awe one would feel when in the presence of the king. The double-horned helmet and wings of this figure indicate that he is a “genius,” a class of figures thought to have acted as both helpmates to the Assyrian kings and intercessors with higher deities. Strong and powerful, he is dressed in the garb of a typical wealthy Assyrian courtier with jewelry that signified rank and power. The genius is using a small bucket and a pinecone to anoint a sacred tree that appeared in a neighboring panel.

These panels were placed at ground level around the ceremonial chamber of the king. The panels were probably carved on site. Artists designed decorative themes while craftsmen carved the designs using metal chisels and wooden mallets. Palace visitors would have been impressed by the size and repetition of the relief figures, and by the written inscription on the lower portion of the relief, which declared the roles and duties of the king as well as his power.

The writing is written in cuneiform (wedge shaped writing) which was developed by the Sumerians over 5,000 years ago. It was one of the world’s first written languages. Originally based on pictograms, over time the pictures became simpler and more abstract. The marks eventually became wedge shaped (because they were pressed with a sharpened reed pen into the wet clay) and conveyed sounds or abstract concepts. The written is similar to, but

more abstract than, Egyptian hieroglyphs.

Guiding Questions to Help Analyze the Source:

1. Who do you think this could be? Where do you think this work would have been found? What makes you say that?
2. Describe the Winged Genius. Why do you think the king chose this type of figure to be displayed in his palace? What does this work of art tell you about government and power in ancient Mesopotamia?
3. Describe the writing on this work of art. Why do you think this writing is important? How would the writing on this piece help an archaeologist decode the meaning of this work?

How does this source help you understand how historians use objects and artifacts to describe the past?